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AUTHOR Beaulieu, Lionel J.
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ABSTRACT

Monumental social and economic problems confront the rural communities of the South. Diversification of the rural economy is the key to revitalizing the rural South, but new industries, anticipating the need for a more highly skilled work force, find the region's human capital resources to be deficient. Vibrant economies are not sustainable in a rural South that leads the nation in the rate of high school dropouts and the proportion of adults that are functionally illiterate. In 1988 nearly 39% of all Southern nonmetro adults and 55% of Southern nonmetro blacks lacked a high school education, compared to 24.4% of all metropolitan Southerners. In 1980 an estimated 25% of all rural Southerners and 40% of rural Southern blacks were functionally illiterate. In addition, the better educated young people are leaving rural areas, showing the greatest net outmigration rates from the rural South in 1985-87. It has been suggested that these problems are symptomatic of an educational system gone awry, and that a turnaround must commence with an overhaul of the educational system. Placing the burden on the educational system alone is not, however, satisfactory. Rather, these problems must become the collective concern of the family, the school, and the community. Building partnerships among these important local elements is essential, partnerships that send a clear signal to all residents that academic performance and literacy are highly valued goals of the community. A vital ingredient in this collaboration is progressive community leadership. This paper contains 59 references and 10 graphs and figures. (SV)

**Building Partnerships for People:
Addressing the Rural South's Human Capital Needs**

A Report of the Task Force on:

*Alternatives for Leadership and Human Resource
Development in Rural Communities in the South*
**Southern Rural Development Center
Mississippi State, MS**

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Building Partnerships For People: Addressing the Rural South's Human Capital Needs¹

INTRODUCTION

The South remains a region of contrasts -- a metropolitan area whose spirited growth and economic expansion have introduced marked improvements in the quality of life of its residents -- versus a nonmetropolitan South, whose current social and economic woes have threatened to whittle away at the gains experienced by rural Southerners during the 1970s. These distinctive paths of development are the end product of a number of key factors. Most basic of these, as argued in this report, are the human capital shortcomings that characterize the South's nonmetropolitan locales.

The following is a product of the Task Force on *Alternatives for Leadership and Human Resource Development in Rural Communities in the South*. The committee, consisting of research and extension faculty drawn from 1862 and 1890 land grant institutions in the South, was organized by the **Southern Rural Development Center** to explore the near and long-term human resource issues facing the rural South. This report begins with an articulation of the social and economic shifts that have taken place in the region's metro/nonmetro areas in recent years. Next, attention is given to the two key human capital concerns prevalent in the rural South -- *high school dropouts* and *adult illiteracy* -- issues that serve as major impediments to the realization of economic and social progress in the area. The final section argues that successful enhancement of the human capital resources in the South's rural localities will require collaborative activities among families, schools, and communities. A major stimulus for the creation of this partnership will be visionary leaders at the local level.

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN THE RURAL SOUTH

The 1980s are proving to be a time when many areas of the rural South are being forced to recognize the harsh realities of their social and economic status in the region and in the United States. This is difficult in light of the fact that only a few short years ago, rural areas of the South were being lauded as meccas of economic and social progress. This vision of optimism was, in part, a result of the population resurgence which touched a host of the region's rural localities during the 1970s. And why not be optimistic? During the 1960s, population in the South's nonmetropolitan areas slipped by 21.3 percent, a stark contrast to the 46.4 percent growth experienced by the metro counties of the region. But the 1970-80 period brought signs of hope to rural areas of the South, with nonmetro growth closely paralleling that of the entire region (16.3 percent versus 20 percent), and lagging behind the South's booming metropolitan population increase by a mere 4.9 percent (see Figure 1).

However, the 1980-86 period offered evidence that major metro/nonmetro population disparities were once again the standard fare in the South. Yes, nonmetropolitan areas did continue to gain in population, but its 5.4 percentage points increase was two-thirds less than that being enjoyed by its metropolitan counterparts. The key question is *Why such a dramatic change over the course of only two short decades?*

[Figure 1 about here]

The factors are not simple, but the worsening economic conditions that have confronted many of the South's rural communities have made population expansion a difficult task at best. A large segment of the rural South remains heavily dependent on traditional, goods-producing industries (such as manufacturing, agriculture, and mining), the very industries that have suffered appreciable hardship in recent years (Henry et al., 1988;

Mulkey and Henry, 1988; Ryan, 1988). As Figure 2 reveals, nearly 32 percent of the region's nonmetropolitan counties draw their principal income from manufacturing activities. In fact, the rural South's reliance on nondurable manufacturing employment is the highest of any region in the country (Hines and Petrusis, 1986; Lyson and Falk, 1986; Martinez, 1985). Mining and farming serve as the primary economic base of another 20.3 percent of Southern nonmetro counties. All told, five of every ten nonmetro counties in the South have economies that are intimately tied to goods-producing activities (Ross, 1989) -- activities that have stifled the economic vitality of many of the South's rural localities during the past decade.²

[Figure 2 about here]

The by-products of this economic downturn have been increasing problems of unemployment and underemployment (Hobbs, 1988; Sullivan and Avery, 1989). If one were to examine the economic performance of the South in recent years, the erroneous conclusion could be reached that unemployment has been held in check. In reality, the strength of the metropolitan economy has masked the difficult times being imposed on many of the region's rural counties. As Figure 3 shows, unemployment has been much higher in the nonmetro South than in metro areas during the entire period of the 1980s. Even as recent as 1987, unemployment stood at 8.4 percent in the nonmetro South -- a figure that was 37 percent higher than the rate experienced by the region's metro localities.

[Figure 3 about here]

An attendant concern has been the issue of underemployment -- a condition commonly associated with the inability to secure full-time employment or to garner earnings that are commensurate with one's qualifications. It is true that rural economic expansion during the 1970s played a significant role in trimming the metro/nonmetro under-employment gap to just 4 percentage points in 1980 (an impressive gain given that the metro/nonmetro

difference was in excess of 9 percent only five years earlier). But, the economic hardships of the early 1980s effectively stemmed further convergence of the metro/nonmetro underemployment disparities. In just two short years (1980-82), the metro/nonmetro underemployment differential accelerated to 8.4 percentage points (Lichter and Constanzo, 1986). Recent evidence (i.e., 1985 statistics) suggests that while the gap is receding, it continues to hover above 7 percentage points.

[Figure 4 about here]

Unfortunately, the economic dislocation that has confronted rural communities in the 1980s has reversed the income gains experienced by many rural residents since the 1960s (Henry et al., 1988). Nationally, poverty has swelled by 22 percent in nonmetropolitan counties since 1979 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1988). Further, metro/nonmetro income figures have widened with the ratio of nonmetro to metro per capita income (expressed in real dollars) dipping to 75 percent in 1984, down from the 78 percent level reached in 1973 (Henry et al., 1988).

As distressing as these national level figures appear, they fail to capture the full extent of individual and family poverty that has permeated much of the rural South (Hoppe, 1985; Congress of the United States, 1986). As a region, the South had 16.1 percent of its residents living in poverty in 1986, versus 13.6 percent for the U.S. as a whole. What is alarming, however, is the high proportion of persons in the South's nonmetro counties classified as being in poverty -- 22.4 percent in 1986. Equally depressing are the statistics for nonmetro families -- in 1986, one in five families in the rural South fell below the poverty line. And unlike the metro South, the percent of both individuals and families living in poverty in the rural South has been on a steady increase since the latter part of the seventies (see Figure 5).³

[Figure 5 about here]

The pervasive nature of poverty in the South nonmetro localities becomes apparent when examined by race and sex. Better than 41 percent of rural black families living in the South in 1986 were poverty stricken. Equally disturbing are the statistics for rural black persons in the South-- nearly 44 percent were in poverty in 1986 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1988). For black households headed by a female, the proportion falling below the poverty line approached the 66 percent mark. And in cases where children under 18 years of age were present in the households, the percent in poverty grew to a startling 78.1 percent (Figure 6).⁴ These figures are not simple aberrations from past trends, but are continuing evidence of the enduring difficulties which these population groupings have experienced over the course of the last several years.

[Figure 6 about here]

Thus, the de-escalated rate of growth in population, the over-dependence on a stagnating goods-producing economy, the high rates of unemployment and under-employment, and the pervasive conditions of low-income and high rates of poverty, are visible symptoms of the monumental social and economic problems that confront today's rural communities of the South. What options exist for the region's rural areas? How can communities and their leaders begin to capably address the myriad of problems threatening their long-term well-being? It is some of the questions that provide a context for the forthcoming sections of this report.

IS RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THE ANSWER?

There is a belief in some circles that the diversification of the rural economy is key to revitalizing the rural communities of the South. With the massive departure of manufacturing industries, coupled with the uncertainty associated with the agricultural and nature resource-based sectors, it is suggested that the future of the South's rural areas lies

with the growth of small business enterprises, with the stimulation of entrepreneurial activities, and with the recruitment of service-producing and high-tech industries (Extension Service/USDA, 1986; Friedman, 1987; Pulver, 1987). The key issue, however, is whether the bulk of rural communities in the region are positioned to capture these types of industries? Unfortunately, the evidence appears to suggest that it is not.

Granted, low taxes, low wage levels, minimal or no unionization, limited public expenditures for services, and the provision of land, buildings or other sweeteners, did induce businesses and industries to locate in the South's rural areas in years past (Corporation for Enterprise Development, 1987). Often, these attributes provided Southern states (especially the rural areas of these states) with high rankings on the traditional business climate assessment measures. But, on the new indicators of economic capacity being formulated for the high growth industries of today and tomorrow, rural Southern communities are judged as highly deficient (Rosenfeld, 1988).

By monitoring the current and anticipated needs of the economy, it is easy to understand why this is so. Consider the following:

- Many new jobs at present are *knowledge intensive* white-collar positions requiring a minimum of some college education (Garland et al., 1988).
- Manufacturing, long considered the mainstay of the rural South's economy, is changing. Low-skilled industries have either closed, moved offshore, or modernized (implying the need for less people, but more highly-skilled workers). New technologically advanced manufacturing firms are sprouting in the urban localities of the South (Sullivan and Avery, 1989). Lost in this structural re-shifting of the manufacturing sector are the unskilled workers located primarily in the rural South.⁵
- By the beginning of the next decade, 3 of every 4 new jobs will require better than a high school education (Ong, 1988; MDC, Inc., 1988). Approximately 90 percent

of these jobs will be located in the service sector (National Alliance of Business, 1986).

- * Of all new jobs in the year 2000, only 1 in 4 will be classified as low-skilled. Today it is 2 in 5 (Swain, 1989). In addition, it is estimated that the median level of education required for jobs at the turn of the century will be 13.5 years (Mendel, 1988).
- * Jobs that are considered middle-skilled in today's environment will be the least skilled occupations of the future (Swain, 1989).

In a recent *Business Week* report, Bernstein (1988) noted that three major forces are spearheading the demand for a highly-skilled workforce: (1) technological advancements are serving to upgrade the work associated with most jobs; (2) accelerated growth in jobs is occurring primarily in highly-skilled occupational categories, particularly in the service-related sector; and (3) companies are embracing the Japanese-style of work teams, an approach that requires workers to be much better skilled in the art of communication.

In surveying the rural South, it is clear that the fundamental problem impeding realization of measured improvements in the economic climate of rural Southern communities is the state of the region's human capital resources. Vibrant economies are unsustainable in a rural South that leads the nation in the rate of high school dropouts, in the proportion of adults suffering from functional illiteracy (Ross and Rosenfeld, 1988), or in an area having the lowest percentage of college-educated adults (Swanson and Butler, 1987). The necessary precursor to the realization of an economic development renaissance in rural communities of the South is a full-fledged commitment to enhancing the human capital resources of these localities -- to addressing the serious problem of high school dropouts, and to attacking the issue of adult illiteracy. Only in this way can economic

security for the South's rural communities and its citizens be truly enhanced (Deaton and Deaton, 1988).

STATUS OF THE RURAL SOUTH'S HUMAN CAPITAL RESOURCES

The human capital resources problems that plague rural America are clearly most applicable to the South. Why is this so? For one, the South is home for nearly half of the nonmetropolitan residents in this country (O'Hare, 1988). Second, factors commonly associated with human capital deficiencies -- such as poverty, illiteracy, and low educational achievement -- are principally concentrated in the rural localities of the South (O'Hare, 1988; Rosenfeld, 1988; Swanson and Butler, 1988; Winter, 1988). A brief reflection on the prevalence of high school dropouts and adult illiterates offers some notion of the human capital shortcomings in the rural South.

It is somewhat disconcerting that five of the ten U.S. states with the poorest high school graduation rates (in 1987) are located in the South.⁶ The state of Florida, a state that John Naisbitt (1982) labels the country's **bellwether state** in his book *Megatrends*, has the unfortunate distinction of ranking first in the nation in the proportion of its high school-aged youth who do not graduate.⁷ And data for rural areas of the South are equally depressing -- high school completion rates are generally lower in these areas than in urban locales (Ross and Rosenfeld, 1988). More specifically, high school graduation rates in the nonmetropolitan counties of the region are nearly 25 percent below those registered in the South's metro counties (Rosenfeld, 1988).

The educational attainment problems of the rural South are clearly reflected in Figure 7. Nearly 39 percent of nonmetro residents 25 years of age and above lacked a high school education in 1988.⁸ For metropolitan Southerners, the figure was 24.4 percent

(approximately 37 percent below the nonmetro percentage). More alarming are the numbers for black nonmetro adults -- approximately 55 percent never completed a high school education (Ross, 1989).

[Figure 7 about here]

Unfortunately, individuals who leave high school prior to graduation commit themselves to a life of economic hardships. Markey (1988), for example, notes that 1 in 5 male dropouts were unemployed in October 1986. For high school graduates, the number was 1 in 10 unemployed. Further, in the face of demands for higher skilled workers, dropouts are having to compete with high school graduates for the dwindling supply of lower-skilled jobs. They simply cannot *fit the bill* for the up-and-coming industries in the region who are demanding a better educated, more adaptive, flexible, and multi-skilled labor force (Moen, 1989; Redwood, 1988). Consequently, there is a very real chance that in this new era of technological sophistication, the school dropout will become permanently displaced from the mainstream of the economy.

An important companion piece to the issue of school dropouts is that of adult illiteracy. There remains no uniform procedure for measuring illiteracy, but one approach that has gained some acceptance is number of school years completed. It is suggested that persons who have completed 8 years or less of education are functionally illiterate (Ross and Rosenfeld, 1987). These individuals are unable to master the ability to read and write to a point where they can operate sufficiently in society (Levine, 1982).

In comparison to other regions of the country, the South has the highest proportion of functional illiterates (see Figure 8). In 1975, over 27 percent of Southerners had less than a high school education. Recent figures (1987) suggest that the illiteracy numbers have gone down, but still, the South retains its position as highest of any section of the country. Closer examination of the southern regional figures uncovers significant differences on the

basis of race. Regardless of the year under investigation, black Southerners are more likely than whites to be functionally illiterate (Figure 9).

[Figure 8 and 9 about here]

What is important to understand, however, is that illiteracy rates are even more dramatic in the rural South. Estimates suggest that one in four rural Southerners above the age of 25 was functionally illiterate in 1980, and for rural Blacks, the number approached 40 percent (Ross and Rosenfeld, 1988; Winter, 1988). The nonmetro South's rate of functional illiteracy was 71 percent higher than that uncovered in the metro area of the region (Rosenfeld, 1988).

Such personal illiteracy has powerful spillover effects on workplace success. Functional illiterates earn 44 percent less than those with a high school education, and are likely to be a less productive force in the local economy (Deaton and Deaton, 1988). The economic vitality of rural areas is directly linked to literacy -- the higher the rates of adult illiteracy, the higher the unemployment rate and the slower the economic growth experienced by rural communities (Rosenfeld, 1988).

In today's economic climate, labor market recruiters *broadcasts a clear message: certain levels of formal schooling are an absolute necessity if one wishes to gain access to jobs* (Harman, 1987:54). Others note that the future of the rural economy is dependent on the capacity of rural people to *work smarter, not just harder* (Reid, 1988), or on the *mental strengths of its labor force* (Johnson, 1988). These are no easy shoes to fill, particularly when the better educated youth -- the very people with whom the hope of reinvigorating the rural economy rests -- are deciding to leave their rural homesteads (O'Hare, 1988; Tweeten, 1988). In both 1985-86 and 1986-87 (as shown in Figure 10), net outmigration from the South's nonmetropolitan areas was greatest among the better educated persons 25 years of age and above.

[Figure 10 about here]

So, in the final analysis, one must ask how competitive can the rural South be when it has the lowest proportion of adults with a high school education, or when its percent of college graduates is 40 percent below the national average (Carlin and Ross, 1987; MDC, Inc., 1986), or when its pool of brightest residents are opting to migrate elsewhere?

PARTNERSHIP: THE KEY STRATEGY

If the rural South is to ever enjoy significant economic and social progress over the long term, then a strengthening of its human capital resources must be given top priority. But in doing so, one must guard against embracing strategies that are too parochial or narrow in their focus. It has been suggested, for example, that the problems of high school dropouts and adult illiteracy are symptomatic of an educational system gone array, and that a turnaround in these problems must commence with an overhaul of the educational system. Is this strategy sufficient, or even appropriate?

Consider the poignant observation offered by Harman (1987:44-45) in his discussion of illiteracy:

The clustering of illiteracy in certain areas strongly suggests that there are illiterate communities -- groups of people living in environments in which literacy plays only a marginal role and where its acquisition is neither encouraged nor supported.

So long as such communities exist, illiteracy rates will continue to soar, no matter how many national illiteracy campaigns are waged. It is more than a question of teaching people to read -- it is a question of reexamining values -- community by community.

Harman's comment offers an important clue regarding effective responses to the human resource problems of the region. Placing the burden on the educational system alone is not satisfactory. Rather, the task of addressing the area's human capital resources must become of collective interest and concern to the **Family**, the **School**, and the **Community**. Building *partnerships* among these important elements in the locality is essential, partnerships that send a clear signal to all residents that academic performance and literacy are highly valued goals of the community -- and that each partner in this triad has a critical role to perform in helping instill those values within the local setting.

[Families, Schools, Community Chart About Here]

Families provide the first inklings of the importance attached to education. Otto (1986) states that children learn beliefs, values and behaviors in the family context. In essence, parents set the stage for the cognitive development of the child via the role modeling that they offer within the home environment. As Honig (1985: 163-64) suggests:

The evidence all points in the same direction; the most important way in which parents can contribute to the education of their children is by what they do at home.... Specifically, the children who typically perform better in school are the children of parents who read to them when they are young, who supervise their homework by making sure they have a quiet place to study, who talk with them about school and everyday events and express an interest in their progress.

The family also offers a capacity for children to adapt to a changing world during his/her working life. With the swift and dramatic technological changes taking place in today's society, research has shown that the individual's capacity to adapt is dependent upon how swiftly he/she can learn to master these new realities and redesign and/or redirect

learning systems to incorporate those realities (Edwards and Snyder, 1988). The bulk of the typical person's ability to do so is derived from the family. Family membership is the principal motivator of responsible personal behavior and of sustained individual commitments to productivity throughout life.

The **school system** provides a valuable resource to the community. But, its success is largely determined by the commitment that families and communities have to its educational mission. Schools are simply a reflection of the community's prevailing attitudes and expectations (Harman, 1987). If families and communities exhibit a hands-off attitude, or show apathy regarding the goings on within the school system, then there is little hope that schools will succeed in stemming the tide of high school dropouts and/or illiterates. Designing useful and enriching educational experiences for students requires schools, families and community working in tandem. Shaping the goals of the school system is a community and family obligation, a responsibility that engenders success for students and schools alike when exercised.

Communities offer an important laboratory for enhancing the experiential base of their youth. They represent valuable opportunities for youth to apply knowledge gained in the classroom to real life situations in the community (National Commission on Youth, 1980). Implementation of career exploration activities, for example, where students are placed in jobs in the community's business, government, or other sectors of the locality, offers a rare opportunity for youth to expand their understanding of the workplace environment. But, the business and governmental sectors of the community must be steadfastly behind this effort if it is to be successful.

The business and government sectors can also play an instrumental role in facilitating parental involvement in the school system. With the increasing prevalence of working parents, few opportunities exist for parents to take an active part in the daytime school-

based activities of their children. However, business and government can be a major force in implementing policies allowing parental involvement in schools during work hours (Ehrlich, 1988). Such policies could serve to underscore business and governments' recognition of the crucial role that parents play in the academic success and career aspirations of their children (Gittleman, 1989; Otto, 1986).

So, in the final analysis, the degree to which real progress is made in enhancing the human capital resources of the South's rural communities will be dependent upon the supportive environment that is fostered within the local arena. If parental and community attitudes suggest that matters of schools and literacy are to be decided by professionals within the educational sector, then problems of high school dropouts and illiteracy will remain ever-present parts of the social fabric of that community. However, if families and communities demand an active role in deciding the educational agenda of the schools, and see academic excellence as an intimate part of their value systems, then substantive improvements in the human capital reserves of the community will indeed evolve over the long term (Harman, 1987).

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP: A VITAL INGREDIENT

Developing a vision of the possible, the achievable with regard to the community's human capital resources can be fostered by enlightened leaders at the local level. The term enlightened implies a leadership that is cognizant of the frailties associated with a community whose human resources are poorly educated or trained for the economic realities of today and tomorrow. It is a leadership that is attuned to those external forces that will influence the socioeconomic stability of the community in the years ahead.

Unfortunately, this type of progressive, forward-thinking leadership is often not present in rural communities. What appears to be the modal characteristic of leadership in rural

localities is one in which issues are addressed by specialized leaders with subject matter expertise in these issue areas. But, the prevalence of special interest leaders can indeed prove problematic (Wilkinson, 1986). As Gardner (1984) notes:

Nothing should be allowed to impair the effectiveness and independence of our specialized leadership groups. But, such fragmented leadership does create problems. One of them is that it isn't anybody's business to think about the big questions facing our society. Where are we headed? Where do we want to head? What are the major trends determining our future? Should we do anything about them? Our fragmented leadership fails to deal effectively with these transcendent questions.

So, in a very real sense, as families, schools, and communities dedicate their energies to addressing the issues of school dropouts and adult illiterates, they must append another item to their list of human capital concerns -- the need to develop a local leadership that is capable of stirring the community to a higher level of excellence with regard to the social and economic security of its residents. Realization of this strengthened leadership will not be easy, but some strategies are worth exploring. For example, the prevalence of special interest leaders in the community represents a talented pool of individuals having the potential to evolve into generalized leaders. Rare is that generalized leader whose understanding of the broad-based needs of the community were not first rooted in local actions having a more-specialized orientation.

Tomorrow's leaders will very likely have begun life as trained specialists, but to mature as leaders, they must sooner or later climb out of the trenches of specialization and rise above the boundaries that separate the various segments of society. Only as generalists can they

cope with the diversity of problems and multiple constituencies that contemporary leaders face (Gardner, 1987).

It is essential that opportunities be offered to help these special interest leaders develop the capacity to fulfill these generalizing roles.

A second strategy would involve extending leadership opportunities to individuals who have had little, if any, involvement in community affairs. High on the list of potential leaders should be people whose voices rarely have been part of the leadership of the past, namely, women, racial/ethnic minorities, and the disadvantaged. They must be an integral part of the leadership of rural localities (Martin and Wilkinson, 1985).

But, it is clear that the long-term hopes for rural communities will rest with their youth. Rare is the occasion, however, where community leadership opportunities have been part of the learning activities offered to younger residents. As one recent article noted, *the qualities of leadership, participation and critical inquiry that are fundamental to the democratic process don't just emerge with adulthood; they must be carefully nurtured by institutions like the family, school and the media. Unfortunately, our cultural institutions aren't fulfilling that mission* (Youth Policy Institute, 1988: 28).

As Israel and Beaulieu (1989) argue, it is time that rural areas begin developing an atmosphere that is conducive to the growth of leadership skills among their younger residents. Schools can be a key force in offering a curriculum that imparts to the students the knowledge and skills needed to participate in community improvement activities. That curriculum, however, must include opportunities to move beyond the classroom and into the real life environment of the community. *By engaging in concrete community development and community service projects, students are given the chance to envision the future of their community and to work on realizing it* (Youth Policy Institute, 1988: 28). These important experiential programs will only be possible, however, if the public and private sectors of the

community work in concert with the school system in supporting these activities (Gardner, 1987).

We must not forget the key role of families in this process. *Behavior standards imposed in the home, the drives engendered there, the values inculcated, the models found in parents -- all affect the later emergence of potentialities for leadership* (Gardner, 1987). Parents who embrace the notion that youth have an important voice in shaping local decisions will likely foster a commitment on the part of their children to community service activities. This type of parental encouragement, coupled with community receptivity to youth involvement, may offer one viable strategy for stemming the departure of talented youth from the rural communities of the South (Israel and Beaulieu, 1989).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is clear that the challenges facing rural communities of the South are monumental. In fact, some might argue that the human resources problems in the rural South are far too significant and complex to address in any effective way. This report urges rural communities of the South to repel such pronouncements and to begin the process of aggressively responding to their human resource shortcomings. The commitment, the hard work, and the vision must originate and be carried out at the local level. The creation of **family, school and community** partnerships can be instrumental in achieving substantive improvements in the locality's human capital resources.

Not to be forgotten, however, are the valuable resources that exist to assist rural communities in their key human resource enhancement activities. Each state's Cooperative Extension Service, for example, is positioned to lend its expertise in the areas of home economics, 4-H youth, community development and agriculture. Such a resource can be a potent force in imparting the knowledge and skills needed by the community to address

its human capital concerns. With faculty located in county Extension offices and state land-grant universities, the Cooperative Extension Service can offer interdisciplinary educational programming that is in concert with the **families, schools, community** partnerships deemed so critical to redressing the human resource shortfalls of the South's rural areas.

Other agencies and organizations can play instrumental roles as well. These include state level departments of education, commerce, and community affairs; community colleges; and university Colleges of Education and Business. The challenge for these groups, including the State Cooperative Extension Service, is to avoid the provision of assistance to rural communities in isolation from one another. Collaboration among these organizations is needed so that the full set of state-level resources can be marshalled to respond to the needs of its rural communities.

Is success assured? Obviously it is not. But, without concerted effort by people at the local level, the future socioeconomic health of many rural communities of the South is tenuous at best. The partnerships must begin now!

¹For purposes of this report, the terms rural and nonmetro are being used interchangeably, as are those of urban and metro. Metropolitan counties are defined as areas having a large population nucleus and which encompass adjacent communities having a high degree of economic and social integration with that nucleus. This includes counties with a central city of 50,000 persons or more, and surrounding counties whose population is substantially dependent on the metropolitan county for work and other important services. All counties which do not meet the criteria of a metro county are classified as nonmetro. Approximately 80 percent of all counties in the South are designated as nonmetro.

²The county classifications provided in Figure 2 are unpublished information contained in a recent paper prepared by Ross (1989). According to Ross, classification of county types were guided by the following definitions: Farming: at least 20 percent of labor and proprietary income from farming, weighted annual average, 1981, 1982, 1984 thru 86; Manufacturing: at least 30 percent of labor and proprietary income from manufacturing, 1986; Mining: at least 20 percent of labor and proprietary income from mining, 1986; Government: at least 25 percent of labor and proprietary income from government, 1986; Retirement: at least 15 percent net immigration rate of people aged 60 and over, 1970-80; Poverty: county with per capita personal income in the bottom quintile in each of the years of 1950, 1960, 1969, and 1979 (Ross, 1989:11).

³For example, between 1983 to 1986, poverty declined by nearly 10 percent among families and 7.5 percent among persons living in metropolitan areas. In the South's nonmetro counties, on the other hand, families and persons in poverty increased by 7.4 percent and 8.2 percent, respectively, over the same period of time.

⁴Since 1975, poverty among all nonmetro female-headed households has increased by 11.6 percent, but has declined by a near equal proportion in metro Southern households. Similarly, poverty among black female-headed households has accelerated by 4.9 percent in nonmetro areas of the South, but has declined 7.2 percent in the region's metropolitan counties.

⁵Ross (1989) offers dramatic evidence of the serious blow that nonmetro workers suffered during the economic distress of the 1980s. She notes that during the 1983-86 period, 45 percent of all nonmetro workers who were displaced from their jobs lived in the South. Further, some 47 percent of displaced manufacturing workers were nonmetro Southerners.

⁶Graduation rates apply only to public schools since private high school graduation data are not available in all states. The adjusted graduation rates were calculated by dividing the number of public school graduates by the public ninth grade enrollment four years earlier. Ninth grade enrollments include a prorated portion of the secondary school students who were unclassified by grade. Graduation rates were also corrected for interstate population migration. Information on the number of persons of graduating age receiving GED's is not currently available. Data on graduation rates were assembled by the National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Bureau of the Census. Appreciation is extended to Linda K. Harageones, Florida Department of Education, who graciously provided the graduation rates information to the Task Force for purposes of this report.

⁷It is important to point out that the District of Columbia actually has a higher non-high school graduation rate than Florida (44.5 percent versus 41.4 percent), but since the

District of Columbia is not a state, Florida's graduation rate is the worse of all 50 states.

⁸The nonmetro figure represents a modest improvement over the 1980 percentages. In 1980, over half of all nonmetro adults in the region lacked a high school education (Ross and Rosenfeld, 1988).

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- Figure 2: Unpublished data provided by Peggy J. Ross, Agriculture and Rural Economy Division/Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.
- Figure 3: Bureau of Labor Statistics Local Area Unemployment Statistics as prepared by the Agriculture and Rural Economy Division/Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.
- Figure 4: Data for 1975, 1980 and 1982 were secured from the article by Daniel T. Lichter and Janice A. Constanzo, "Underemployment in nonmetropolitan America, 1970 to 1982." Full citation is provided in the reference section. The 1985 figure was graciously provided by Daniel T. Lichter.
- Figures 5 and 6: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports Series P-60, *Poverty in the United States*. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. Selected issues from the P-60 series were used to prepare these figures.
- Figure 7: Peggy J. Ross, "Human resources in the South: directions for Rural Sociology in the 1990's." See reference section for the complete citation.
- Figures 8 and 9: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Report, Series P-20, *Educational Attainment in the United States*. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. Various issues from the P-20 series were used to prepare these figures.
- Figure 10: The 1985-86 figures were drawn from the article by Linda L. Swanson and Margaret A. Butler, "Human resource base of rural economies," while the 1986-87 figures were secured from the work of Peggy J. Ross, "Human resources in the South: directions for Rural Sociology in the 1990's." See reference section for complete citations on these two works.

Figure 1
Population Change in the South

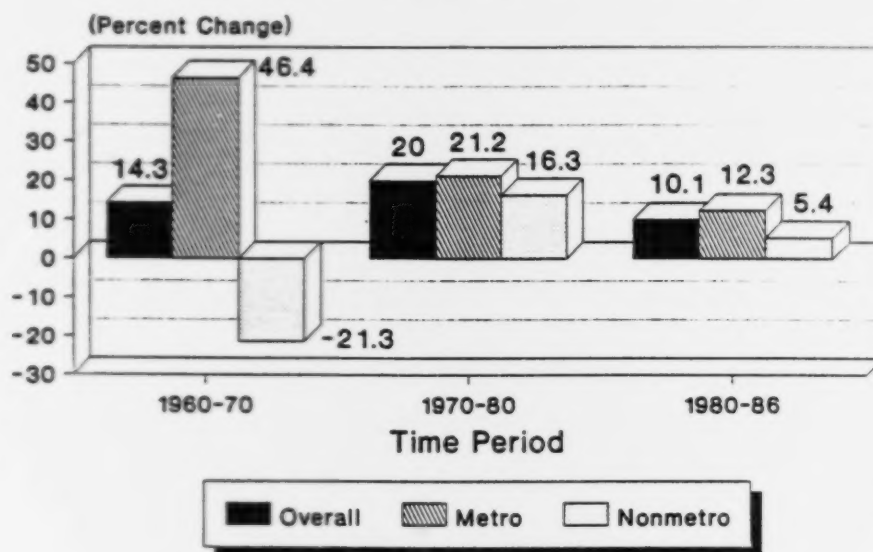


Figure 2
Economic Bases of Nonmetro
Counties, 1986

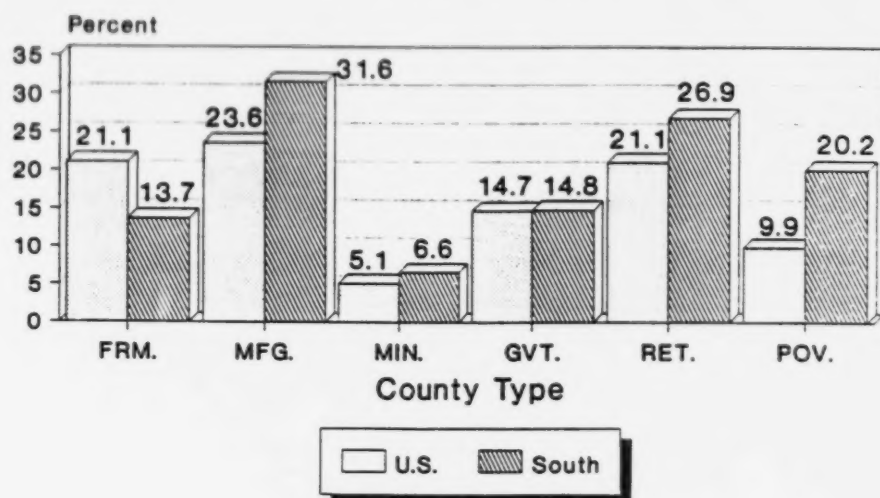


Figure 3
Unemployment Rates in the South

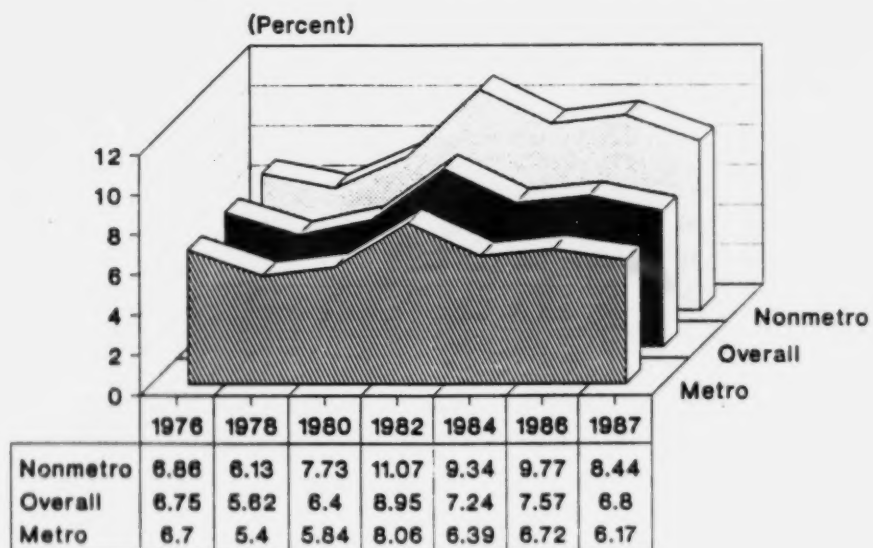


Figure 4
Economic Underemployment
in the South

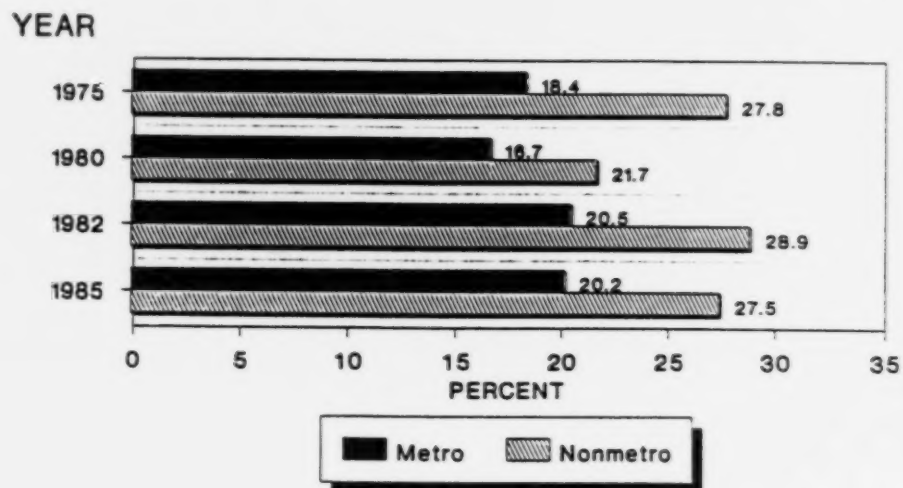


Figure 5
Poverty in the South
Among Persons and Families

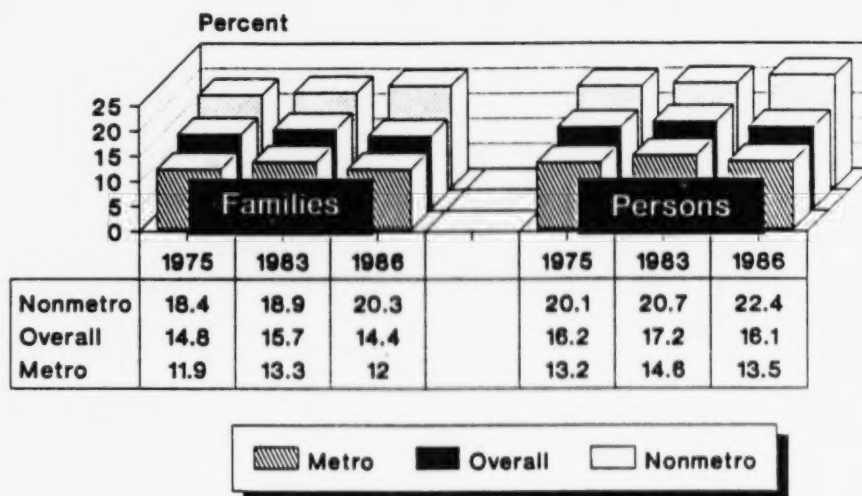


Figure 6
Family Poverty Among Female
Headed Households-Children Under 18

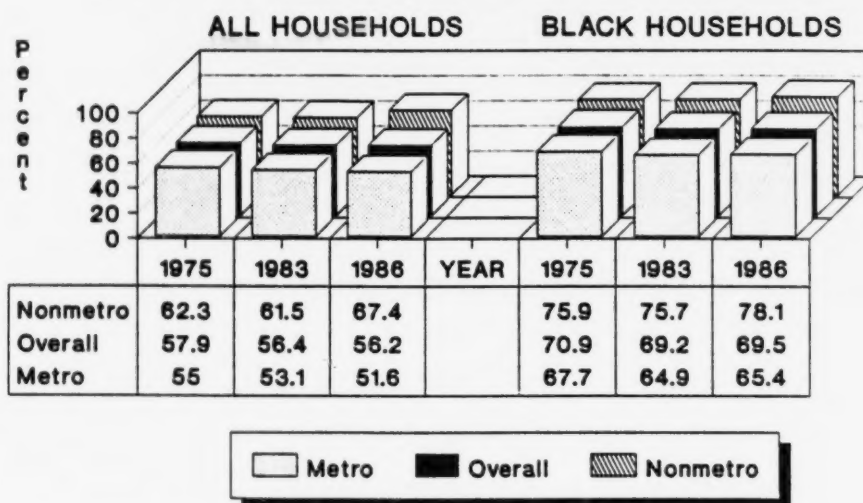


Figure 7
Non-High School Graduates in the South
by Race and Residence, 1988

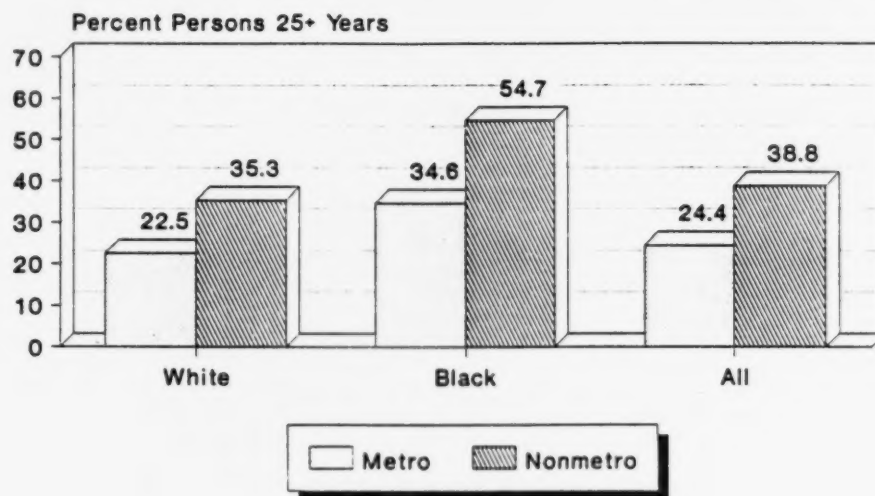


Figure 8
Persons With Less Than a High School Education (25 Years Old and Above)

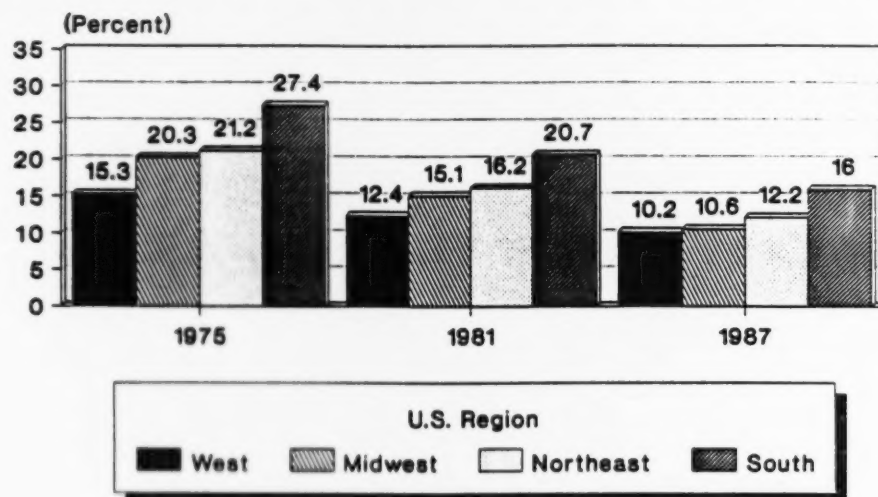


Figure 9
Education Status of Southerners by Race
(25 Years of Age and Above)

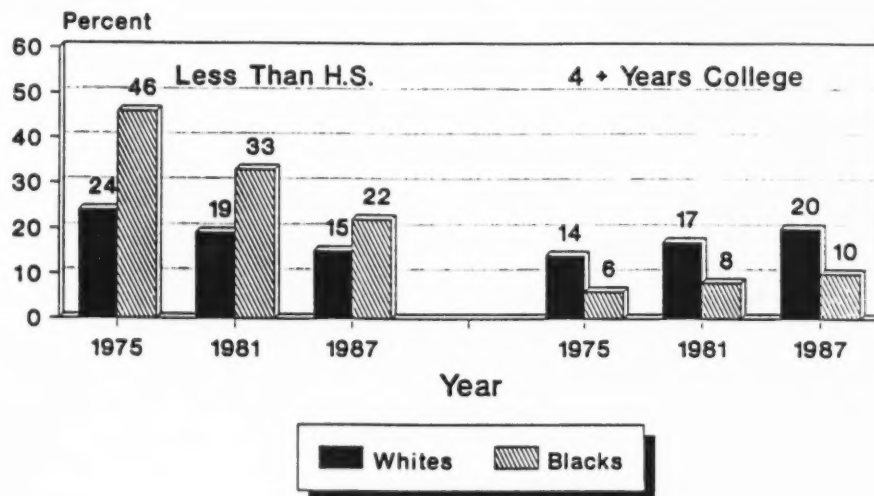


Figure 10
Net Migration Rates of Nonmetro
Southerners by Educational Level

